From library notebook
compiled by

East Sudbury Charitable Library.

Notes concerning.

The Rev. John Burt Wight on becoming the settled minister of the then only religious Society in the town, brought with him clear and enlarged views of the value of books. His ordination occurred in 1815.

Soon after his settlement he commenced the formation of a Library composed largely of moral and religious books for the free distribution and use of any citizen of the town who might apply for them. Contributing largely from his own Library, and soliciting voluntary contributions of books from other sources with occasional purchases from pecuniary contributions taken at the Church, the Library increased in the course of a few years to about Three hundred volumes.

It was kept for many years at the house of Mr. Wight, who gave his time and attention to the care and delivery of the books. For upwards of fifteen years it was a highly valued source of information and improvement to a large class of readers of all ages. The book

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adapted to the young are well remembered by some who drew their first impulses for book-reading from this source.

About the time of Mr. Wight's relinquishing his parochial charge, the Library was removed to the Vestibule of the Meetinghouse, and, it is believed, was not at all times under proper care; so that many of the books were lost to the Library.

About Seventy volumes were transferred to the Wayland Public Library soon after it was opened to the public.

It would appear that this collection of books was, in fact, the first Free Public Library of the Town, and as such, reflects a double honor on its founder, who also was eminently efficient in establishing the Wayland Library.

J. S. D.

Mar. 13 – 1878.

For list of books transferred to the Wayland Library, see Book of Donors, in Library Archives.

Previous to the year 1815 The Revd. Richard Baxter's works in a thick folio volume (now in the Public Lib.) was kept in the Meetinghouse for devout persons to read on Sundays.

split in twain. Dr. Lyman Beecher was sent to our town, and held a series of meetings in the hall of the "Old Green Store," as Mr. Bullard's house, built out of the timbers of the fourth meeting-house, was called. Here he fiercely denounced the new dispensation, and the young pastor of the First Parish, an early convert to the new faith, met the issue then and there.

The question for the church to answer, and to answer at once, was this: Shall the old Calvinistic theology with its traditional and Biblical basis, identified with this church since its foundation, continue; or shall we, abandoning tenets and dogmas which our God-given reason can no longer in fair justice to itself or to the God who gave it, accept; seek by the new light of intellectual and spiritual enfranchisement, a broader and fuller revelation of God?

The reply was that of nine-tenths of the old New England churches, and a large majority of the parish sustained Mr. Wight in the change from the old Calvinistic to the new Unitarian faith. Eighteen persons, however, fifteen women and three men, withdrew from the church, and founded the present Evangelical Trinitarian Society in Wayland, giving it a name which would leave no doubt as to their theological status.

This change in sentiment of the majority of the First Parish was not, as has been stated, sudden. It had been evident for many years. The growing liberalism of the three predecessors of Mr. Wight is noticeable to a student of the history of this church. Mr. Bridge had even questioned the dogma of the Trinity, and his successor had held equally radical views, thus gradually preparing the way for the climax of Mr. Wight's time.[8] The earlier preaching of the church, as shown in existing sermons, notably those of the Rev. Israel Loring, was, viewed in the light of our own days, horrible. It would be charitable to consider these as the ravings of a madman, and it is highly probable that the development of liberal thought in this church was largely a reaction from such preaching.

Mr. Wight's pastorate lasted formally some twenty

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John B. Wight

years, the exact date of its closing being somewhat obscure, but as pastor emeritus in effect it continued all his life. As a citizen, his activities and interests were many and wide. As chairman of the school committee for many years, he left the indelible mark of his progressiveness on that institution, as on the parish. He was blessed with a happy home and family. The old "Parson Wight" homestead is remembered by many of us as standing nearly opposite the present school building on the Cochituate Road, and now, moved to the hilltop behind its old site, exists, enlarged and beautified, as the home of Mr. Arthur B. Nichols.

A daughter of Mr. Wight, as teacher in the Perkins Institution for the Blind under Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, had the special care and teaching of Laura Bridgman, the deaf, dumb, and blind girl, whose wonderful development under Dr. Howe attracted the attention of the world.

LIBRARY

Mr. Wight may be said to have been a bibliomaniac. His passion for books was unbounded. In the present town library are several ancient and rare imprints, collected and highly prized by him, indicative of a refined taste and enthusiasm in this interest. On his coming to the town Mr. Wight found the organization of the East Sudbury Social Library existing, but deemed many of its provisions unsatisfactory. Its circulation was limited to the proprietors. He believed that the use of books and access to them should be absolutely free. With this end in view he began a collection of books by subscription, gift, or loan, known as the East Sudbury Charitable Library, which ultimately reached the number of some three hundred volumes. This library, at first kept in his home and afterward in this church, was free to all, the use of it constantly urged and encouraged by him.

This may be called the second stage in the development of the Free Public Library idea in Wayland. Its culmination was soon to be realized. In 1847 President Wayland, of Brown University, interested in Wayland through his friend and classmate, the Hon. Edward Mellen, and by the incident of the identity of name, offered the town the sum

from: Griffin, Alfred W. A hundred years of the old meeting house.

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of $500 for the establishment of a public library, provided the citizens raise by subscription an equal amount. $534 was immediately subscribed, and Mr. Wayland at once placed his donation in the hands of Judge Mellen.

The matter, coming before the town at town meeting, was referred to a committee, including Mr. Wight and the Rev. Edmund H. Sears, they to report at a subsequent meeting. At this stage a serious difficulty presented itself, greatly retarding the consummation of the library plan. While the fund could be held by the town as a gift or bequest, no authority existed for the maintenance of a library as a branch of the town's administration by taxation. This difficulty was temporarily overcome by the town's making the payment of taxes levied for this purpose optional with the tax-payers. Rules and regulations for the library were adopted May 8, 1848, a room prepared in the town house, now Mr. Lowell's store, and on Aug. 7, 1850, the first books were delivered. The two existing private libraries were merged into the new town institution, as were the school libraries, which, through the activities of Mr. Wight as chairman of the school committee, had been placed in the six school districts of the town.

The final obstruction to the maintenance of the town library was removed by Mr. Wight in 1851, when as representative in the State legislature he drafted and presented a bill authorizing the establishment and maintenance of public libraries by taxation, which bill was passed and signed by the governor May 24, 1851.

Thus was founded and established the first free public library in Massachusetts, and to no one more than to John Burt Wight is credit due; and for this achievement, in his case but one of many affecting the interests of church and state, is he entitled to the grateful memory of the people of this town.

On the 20th of February, 1839, in this building was dained to the Christian ministry the man whose name pears last in date upon our tablet, the ninth pastor of church.

If as the town of his ordination, his home after marri the birthplace of his three sons, pastorate of eight years, scene of the celebration of his silver wedding, where the greater part of his literary work, now house words over all the world, was done,—if these give Wayl a right to claim a large share in the life of Edmund Ha ton Sears as her own, she has this right.

A modest, retiring, even shy young man he appeared that eventful day of his ordination and settlement as pas His friend and classmate, the Rev. Henry W. Bell thus describes his appearance as a youth:—

> His was a proud modesty and frank reserve, with a face half orie half aboriginal, in its dark eyes, high cheek-bones, and tawny comple mingled with New England features.

A quiet, reserved student, shrinking instinctively f contact with the sordid, practical, unlovely things of he appeared and was, but there was a light in his eye, a back of the head, a grimness of that New England mo which indicated the invincible strength, and iron determ tion of the fighter to the death, if need be.

He was a Berkshire lad, descended from the Plymo pilgrims, an incarnation of the best New England tradit and character, as exemplified in so many of his mig contemporaries in that wonderful flowering time of lit ture and thought. Among these honored names, hist has placed that of the shy, farm-bred, sensitive young lege graduate who was ordained here that day.

He was a graduate of Union College, which later ferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity, an the Harvard Divinity School of the class of 1837.

Mr. Wight's successor, the Rev. Richard T. Austin, a